Strategies for Students with Disabilities to Access the General Education Curriculum

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Evolving Policies Impacting Practice

On the special ed side:

- An expressed preference for "mainstreaming" in IDEA since its passage in 1975
- By 1997, the phrase "access to the general education curriculum" appeared in IDEA.

- IEP's must address how a child's disability affects **involvement/progress in general education curriculum**
- IEP's must describe special education and related services provided to the child to support **involvement and progress in curriculum**
- Specially designed instruction – adapting content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to ensure **access of the child to the general ed curriculum**

On the general ed side:

- Improving America's Schools Act of 1994(IASA) introduced components of standards-based reform (high standards, assessment, accountability)
- Variable implementation and approaches across states led to specific requirements built into NCLB in 2001

Standards-Based Reform Model -
- High content *standards*;
- Use of *assessments* to measure how schools are helping students meet these standards; and
- An emphasis on *accountability*, i.e., holding educators and students responsible for student achievement

Alignment of NCLB/IDEA

- Successful educational outcomes for ALL students
- Statewide assessment accountability for ALL students
- Consequences for not assessing all students

- Access to the general curriculum is essential to closing the achievement gap and helping schools achieve AYP goals.
- **And – new regulations for the 2% (modified performance standards) specifically stipulate standards-based IEPs.**

The end result -

- All students must participate in statewide assessment
- Options (not a perfect for all) have been developed to support the participation of all students with disabilities
- All assessments (including the CRT-Alt) are aligned with state content standards, BUT……………..
- **Many students with disabilities are not receiving standards-based instruction on a daily basis.**

Sources of Tension for Special Educators

Concept/Issue	NCLB	IDEA
Instructional priority	Academics	Academics, behavior, life skills, parent-identified priorities, etc.
Focus of assessment	Endpoint, single primary measure	Entry point: present levels of performance; skill acquisition relative to objectives
Valued metric	Group-centered, AYP	Individual
Focus of goals	System, uniform	Individualized, modified

Yell et al., 2006

Standards-Based IEPs

One logical step to promote access – building from a student's present level of performance.

Classroom Instruction That is Responsive to the Needs of Diverse Learners

A necessary context in which this can happen.

Both of these actions require some shifts in thinking/practice and…….

Both of these actions require sustained collaboration between general and special educators.

Adding a Standards-Based Focused to Individual Student Planning

Promoting access to the general education curriculum

First Things First: What Does this Mean?

Access
- Beyond presence in the general education classroom for some
- Learning how to support others who have been excluded
- Linking specialized instruction that may occur elsewhere to the general education curriculum

General Education Curriculum
- The full range of courses, activities, lessons, and materials routinely used by the general population of a school
- A standards-based curricular scope and sequence that defines what is important for all students to know and learn

One Current Access Strategy : Retrofitting

- Special educators supporting students in general education classrooms provide suggestions about modifications and accommodations
- They may do this without ever really "being there"!

Retrofitting the curriculum….

…as distracting and cumbersome as retrofitting buildings.

What does this typically entail?

- Reduce complexity
- Reduce "amount" of something
- Extra time
- Modified materials
- Many barriers associated with reliance upon print materials
- Paraeducator support

How Effective is this in Practice?

- Research has highlighted "mismatch" between "desirability" and "feasibility" of accommodations
- A lack of understanding of the general education context has been identified as a barrier to effective consultative supports
- Your experiences?????

Impact of Retrofitting

"Curriculum matters, and "fixing" the one-size-fits-all, inflexible curriculum will occupy both special and general educators well into the future" (Hitchcock et al., 2002, pg. 9).

Other Prevailing Curricular Practices but RtI Models Introducing New Approaches

- Replacement Curriculum
- Alternate Curriculum

- Typically are separate, disconnected from the "regular" curriculum

Frontloading: An Alternative to Retrofitting

- Build in supports from the initial point of lesson design
- Typically done collaboratively
- Consider needs of ALL students from the start

- These strategies are evident when using evidence-based methods such as:
  - Differentiated Instruction
  - Universal Design for Learning
  - Co-Teaching

Lesson Planning Form

Date:_____ Class Period:_____ Unit:_____

Lesson Objective(s): _____

Materials	Evaluation

In Class Assignments	Homework Assignments

LESSON PLANNING FORM

Pyramid	Agenda

What some students will learn.

What most students will learn.

What ALL students should learn.

Pyramid Planning Form

(Schumm, Vaughn, & Leavett, 1994)

- <u>Begins</u> with expectations of differentiated outcomes, based on individual student needs, but all outcomes are aligned with identified standards, representing varying levels of complexity of the learning outcome
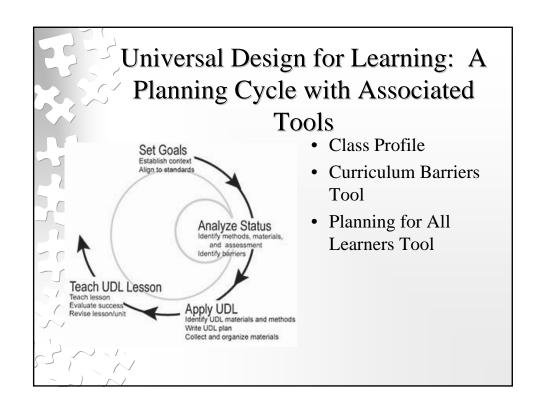
Universal Design in Education

As applied to learning, Universal Design means the design of instructional materials and activities that allows the learning goals to be achievable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities to see, hear, speak, move, read, write, understand English, attend, organize, engage, and remember.

Universal Design is achieved by…

- Using flexible curricular materials and activities that provide alternatives for students with disparities in abilities and backgrounds.

  UDL Editions Example

- Alternatives should be BUILT INTO the instructional design and materials, not added later on.

Universal Design for Learning: A Planning Cycle with Associated Tools

- Class Profile
- Curriculum Barriers Tool
- Planning for All Learners Tool

Organizing Instruction to Address Heterogeneity in a Differentiated Instruction Model
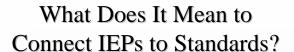
- Menus
- Tiered lessons
- Tic Tac Toe

If we use these type of instructional practices, can we support access for students with disabilities?

Developing Standards-Based IEPs

What Does It Mean to Connect IEPs to Standards?

What it does **NOT** mean—

- Writing goals that restate the standards
- Using the standards alone to determine goals
- Assuming that every student will work only on grade-level content

What Does It Mean to Connect IEPs to Standards?

What it **DOES** mean—

- Referring to standards to determine expectations at grade level
- Using the standards as a guide to determine what is important for the student to learn or be able to do
- Consider extended standards and benchmarks for students with more significant disabilities

The IEP Team Standards-Based Decision-Making Process

A example of a process, developed by the West Virginia Department of Education

Step 1

- **Review the student's past performance on the curriculum standards and review the grade level standards and performance descriptors for the student's next grade level.**
  - What grade-level skills will be taught?
  - What are the general education setting demands?

Step 2

- **What is the impact of the student's disability/exceptionality on achievement of grade level content standards?**
  - What are the student's needs and how do they impact his/her learning of the standards?

Step 3

- **What is the impact on achievement of the corresponding grade level objectives in the affected content standard(s)?**
  - What levels of understanding are expected at the next grade level objectives as compared to the previous grade level objectives?
  - Which objectives are still barriers to the student's progress toward grade level performance?

Step 4

- **What do the grade level performance descriptors identify as mastery level student performance in the particular content standard(s) by the end of the year?**
  - What does mastery level look like?
  - How does the mastery level performance descriptor inform the specially designed instruction?

Step 5

- **Identify the areas for specially designed instruction.**
  - What can the IEP team learn from the data about student's performance?
  - Based on the data, what is the focus?
  - Are there skills that the student missed over time?
  - Do the objectives need to be clustered or chunked?

Step 6

- **Describe the specially designed instruction that will lead to grade level mastery and beyond.**
  - What can be done to minimize the impact, both short-term and long-term, of the exceptionality on the student's educational performance?
  - How can specially designed instruction make the biggest impact toward grade level or above performance?

Step 7

- **Determine the special education services that will lead toward grade level mastery and beyond.**
  - What is the type and amount of *direct* services needed to achieve the annual goals and short-term objectives?
  - What supplementary aids and services are needed to support the student in the general education classroom?
  - How is the instruction delivered? By whom? In which environment?
  - What instructional support/scaffolding is needed for the student to succeed in the regular education classroom?

Step 8

- **How will the student's progress toward grade level mastery be monitored and evaluated?**
  - How will the student demonstrate progress toward grade level mastery?
  - What multiple measures will be conducted? By whom? In what environments? How frequently?
  - What authentic performance tasks will be designed to evidence student learning?
  - How will the multiple performance measures be reflected in the IEP evaluation procedures?

Step 9

- **How will the student participate in grade level statewide assessments?**
  - Are the accommodations the same ones used in classroom instruction?
  - Do the selected accommodations result in getting the best measure of what the student knows and can do on the skill being tested?

The 9-Step decision-making process assists the IEP team in

- Thinking differently about the IEP process;
- Developing meaningful IEPs that apply the state curriculum framework to individual student needs;
- Focusing discussions on access, participation and progress in the general curriculum by beginning with grade level performance standards; and
- Providing appropriate instructional supports to ensure the student achieves at higher levels in a standards-based educational system.

A Few Final Thoughts…

- Placement decisions must be based on IEP content that ensures educational benefit by providing opportunities for higher achievement.

- With support, general education teachers who set high expectations, utilize research-based instructional practices and provide the necessary support for success, can maximize learning for ALL students.

- IEP team decisions *profoundly* affect how students with disabilities will meet the challenges of a standards-based educational system. Our limitations should not limit our students. We need to seek out effective "best practices" and be willing to try new approaches to planning and delivering instruction.